

## HOW TO FEEL ABOUT JEWS: A CHRISTMAS '84 MEDITATION --- ELLIOTT

My Christmas letter in today's (21Dec84) CAPE COD TIMES prompts me to extend the message inward from the general public to the small public of my thinksheets.

1. Till Kingdom ("Reign"? "Rule"?) come, Jews and Christians will be antipodal twins. **TWINS:** Our births were simultaneous, viz., 1st c. AD/CE (our time-references from Jesus' birth being twin: this era of "our Lord" is "Common" to us). (Quibble: You have your choice as to whether you date Judaism Chinese-style, to include gestation, or--as I do--from parturition, separation from the Temple cultus, AD/CE 70.)\* **ANTIPODAL:** The metaphor is from opposite sides of the globe, emphasizing the dissimilarities of twins (who necessarily bear many similarities)--differences by nature and (including self-identity struggle) nurture. So that's my first point: You are to feel about Jews as one twin naturally feels about the other: ambivalent--the same way Jews are to feel about us Christians. By "naturally" here I mean what in this printed letter I call "historically and spiritually."

2. Another metaphor: What Mary the Jew was to Jesus' birth, Judaism is to the birth of Christianity. We Christians should meditate on, and so shape our feelings about, this multiple connection. We can extend to Judaism and Jews (together and individually) the positive feelings we have about Mary--a kind of "Marian devotion."

3. The NT, which is antisemitic in just the same way and for just the same reasons as early Jewish writings are anti-Christian, is ambivalent about Jewish-Christian relations today and tomorrow. Why not (antipodal twins, you remember)? And why not antisemitic, since it has its own corrective to excesses thereof? (Same goes for NT "sexism": stupid and sad that some folks imagine that NT can/should be "cleaned up" from antisemitism and sexism.) **NOTE:** Because Christianity is historically and presently the dominant sibling, one must correct for the impression that Christians have always been more antiJew than Jews have been antiChristian. A Jewish corrective to this has just been published: Lawrence H. Schiffman, **WHO WAS A JEW? RABBINIC AND HALAKHIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SCHISM (KTAV/84):** what split us into two religions was the Jewish halakhic definition of Jewish identity. At first, Jews viewed us as "minim," Jews but heretics; but when the churches dropped, as membership requirements, the traditional notes of Jewish identity-status (e.g., circumcision), early-2nd.-c. rabbis "began to regard" Christians "as members of another religious community." So how, on this, should we feel about Jews? That for self-preservation ("self" as tradition, association, and person) they had to include us out, so dissociating themselves from us. The same sociodynamic process can be seen in NT: Paul and others fought off the "Judaizers" when

### 'Time of Lights'

As an old Christian scholar who has taught many scores of rabbis, I see no way to improve on the Dec. 18 editorial, "Time of the Lights."

The happy calendar-conjoining of Hanukkah and Christmas is, to Christians, a divine invitation to remember and celebrate what you say: "the preservation of Judaism made possible the birth of Christianity." I must leave it to the Jews to say what this conjunction means to them.

And both we peoples, Jews and Christians, had better be clear, in this year-time of nostalgia and hope, that we two are bound -- historically and spiritually -- to each other as neither of us is bound to any other people. So may God deliver us both from the arrogances with which we have afflicted each other.

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\*Confirmation: Both PA (Pirke Abot) and ARN (Abot de Rabbi Nathan) exhibit a new, post-70 AD/CE understanding of Torah: A.J. Saldarini, SCHOLASTIC RABBINISM, Scholars/82....No big matter: "Judaism" is a continuous flow from "Abraham," and how you cut the sausage depends on what you are up, and God grant that you know it.

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the shoe was on the other foot.

4. As this thinksheet's title should lead one to expect, I'm here discussing how Christians should feel about Jews: everybody knows how we have felt about this minority that is still awkwardly among us, challenging the mythos (the Incarnation-Atonement-Resurrection-Return) by which we Christians define ourselves--an annual Christmas symbol of which is Jews all over the tele attacking the public use of the baby Jesus in the manger (as though Christianity were not, historically and presently in the American civilization, the dominant sibling, but only an equal within a paradigm being called "pluralism"). The annual battle of the creche, going on as my letter appears in the CAPE COD TIMES, worries me; and my letter fights with the forces that unite us Jews and Christians against the forces (including this annual creche battle) that divide us.

5. But I must mention that we should have about Jews some feelings that we have had. Among us Americans, they are a minority only 1/2 the size of Blacks; but religiously more threatening--for whereas Blacks in general confirm our Christian mythos, Jews (except for "Hebrew Christians" and "Jews for Jesus") combat our Christian mythos (more or less actively, but essentially--historically: a "low christology" is as locked into Judaism as is ritual circumcision). Thank God that theoretical possibilities of "christological" reconciliation are opening up; but to date, Christianity's central "Mystery" has appeared to Jews only as blasphemy, and in this Jews have appeared to Christians to be not only unbelievers but also blasphemers, with all the negative feelings pertinent to that appellation. The project: How to soften by the human sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, history) the theological conflict without becoming dishonest to the latter.

6. Feel that observant Jews are fellow-fighters with us observant Christians against secularists (Christians, Jews, and others who do not live/feel/think on the biblical-theistic assumption). Together we faithful bear the burden of the spiritual heart of "the West." Or to stay with the twins analogy: Formerly the religious twin was dominant, and now (despite the rumpus on the Right) the secular twin is dominant (in culture: theism, when not absent, is a sideshow in the media). It's a new cutting of the cards: feel closer to faithful Jews than you do to non-church-going Christians. (NOTE: Church-going defines Christians in being the single objective denominator: synagogue-attendance is only one factor in defining Jews, who are "a people" in more senses than we are. Because in this sense America as a Christian land is more important to us even than Israel as a Jewish land is to Jews, the battle of the creche is more serious than many Jews realize: the invisible majority/minority contract is being breached, a sacred tradition subjected to peril from a conflict over secular egalitarian rights treated, by the anti-creche forces, as sacred. Viewed positively, the battle of the creche is an opportunity for enriching Jewish-Christian dialog and life in America and so in the world.) (No, I wouldn't lift a finger to support a public creche; but I'm worried about those who lift a fist to smash it--literally, in some instances this year.)

7. Let's feel good about the Jews that, in surviving, they've done something good not only for themselves (and does not every people have the right to survive?) but also for us Christians and for the West and for the world.

\*Note here a double dialectical disadvantage for us Christians: Jews must defend only their own mythos, but we Christians must defend both theirs and ours (which piggybacks on theirs)...so don't we, who are in this more vulnerable position, have the right to be touchier? and tougher in debate against Jews and secularists?